

FEATURE

Martin Duif headed to UCI World Championships with Team Canada for paracycling

Former Listowel resident paralyzed in diving accident 22 years ago

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LISTOWEL – A former resident of Listowel, Martin Duif, is headed off to Ostend, Belgium in May to participate with Team Canada at the UCI World Championships for paracycling.

“It’s a privilege,” said Martin. “It’s something that not everybody gets to experience in their lifetime.”

Martin moved to Listowel from Holland in 1997 when his parents bought a broiler chicken farm. His parents still live in the area, as well as his brother, who works in the dairy industry.

A few short years later in July 2002, at the young age of 17, Martin and some of his friends were going for a swim on a Sunday afternoon after playing a round of golf.

“I tripped [while] diving into a swimming hole,” he said. “I just couldn’t correct myself mid-air and went in head first and knew right away that I’ve done something that was bad.”

Martin immediately knew that

he was paralyzed, and told his friends his neck was broken and to keep him stabilized and to call an ambulance.

“Unfortunately, for myself, I broke the one piece of my body which doesn’t repair itself,” he shared.

Martin fractured and displaced his C5 and C6 vertebrae.

After recovering from the initial surgery and spinal shock, he spent half a year in a spinal cord injury rehabilitation centre. This is where he began learning how to maximize his function with the resulting quadriplegia.

“I’ve never really let it hold me back,” he said. “If anything, I would say it probably made me appreciate things more... and I also pushed myself to be the best version of myself.”

Going home from the hospital in a power chair, Martin caught up in school and graduated from Listowel District Secondary School. He then went on to study at the University of Guelph and graduated with a commerce degree.



Contributed Photo
Former Listowel resident Martin Duif is headed to Belgium in May to participate with Team Canada at the UCI World Championships for paracycling. Duif became paralyzed in 2002 in a diving accident.

Renewed interest in sports

By this point, he was tired of using a power chair and worked hard to become strong and adept at using a manual chair.

“This is when his renewed interest in sports began,” said Martin’s wife, Pauline Duif.

He played wheelchair rugby for quite a few years, and travelled across North America for tournaments. After a relocation to Ottawa in 2016, he started doing 10-20 km pushes along the Rideau Canal to build up his cardio strength.

Martin soon picked up cycling in 2018 to “take advantage of the area that I lived in... where you got all those roads and trails,” he said.

Ten hours of his week are now dedicated to on-bike training, plus hours of cross-training alongside his full-time career in finance.

His wife, who is a rehab nurse, is an avid cyclist herself and Martin’s support rider on 50 and 70 km training rides.

Biking with just your arms is already impressive, but his C5-C6 injury means Martin has four functional muscles in his shoulders and arms – trapezius, deltoids, biceps and brachioradialis. Having no hand function means his hands are strapped directly to his cranks.

“It’s a fun activity to do with friends and family,” said Martin. “Then the competitive side of it is, I just really enjoy to go fast and I like to always best my last performance.”

“It’s something that you can set goals with quite easily.”

Martin told the *Banner* that he does not think he is doing anything special.

“I have a passion for this and I do train a lot and there’s a time commitment to that. I don’t consider it special; I think almost anybody would do this if they had the opportunity.”

However, Pauline said, “It is really inspiring, and it’s really incredible to see him accomplish so much in such a small amount

of time.

“If you meet him, you would think he doesn’t have his arms affected at all by his paralysis.”

GoFundMe

However, Martin still requires the specialized adaptive equipment needed by para-athletes, and it is “double to triple the cost” of the already high-end competitive road bike market.

In order to be competitive in his field, Martin also needs to upgrade to a customized carbon handcycle. Also due to his quadriplegia, every cycling event requires an attendant to fly or travel with Martin to assist with luggage, transportation, bike assembly/maintenance and on-site event support.

To help with the cost of the trip, equipment and other needs, a GoFundMe link was started by Jordan Tervit, and is available to those who are interested in donating.

To donate, visit gofund.me/b793edda.

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